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ABSTRACT

The goal of this study is to find salient conditions and categories of conditions that seem to be important factors in parents' control over their children's early linguistic environment. Five families in a small academic community in the U.S. Midwest were identified. One parent was a native speaker of English (L1) and the other, a native speaker of French (L2). Open ended interviews were used in an attempt to discover the conditions which seem to be necessary and those which are generally typical of families in which there is a goal of childhood bilingualism. The conditions and their interrelationships are categorized in relation to the initial decision, the source of L2, and changes which affect the implementation of the initial decision. Important conditions regarding the initial decision seem to be emotional attachment to L2 and the language spoken between the parents before the birth of their child. The presence of monolingual grandparents is an important condition for implementation and one that will change over time. Additional effects on implementation, not present at the time of the initial decision, such as birth of other children and entrance to school, may affect parental implementation of the initial decision. All the conditions can be conscious or accidental; all affect in one way or another children's acquisition of both languages. (AMH)

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BILINGUAL CONTROL IN FAMILIES

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Childhood bilingualism has been studied from various perspectives. Most studies have focused upon the form(s) of the child's language. Werner Leopold's classical study of the acquisition of German and English by Hildegard (Leopold, 1938-45) is perhaps the best known longitudinal study. More recently, both diary studies and experimental research have added to what we know about the early acquisition of two languages. For example, Burling (1959) describes the acquisition of a non-Indoeuropean language (Garo) by his daughter. Swain, Maiman and Dumas (1977) have examined the early morphological development of fifty five-year-old English speaking children as they learned French. From these studies we learn a great deal about the formal structure of the languages acquired sequentially and simultaneously.

Recently, the importance of context in both first language acquisition and second language learning has been underscored. The importance of contact in first language acquisition, i.e. the language of caretakers, has been reviewed in Snow and Ferguson (1976). The context of the classroom and its importance has been long understood. Rivers (1968) and Paulston, Bruder (1976) devote ample space to the topic. Context is more than language. Attitudes, relationships, goals and setting all contribute to the linguistic environment we call context.

In this paper we will examine some very explicit aspects of the context of childhood bilingualism, viz., the attitudes, beliefs and goals of parents who elect more or less consciously to bring up their children in a language which is alien to the linguistic environment of the community in which they are living. Parents control early language environment. We believe that the controls which parents exert over the early linguistic environment of their children can be viewed as an aspect of rule-governed behavior, that is, the parental controls constitute the systematic environmental factors that are specified in the rules that describe behavior. Controls derive from attitudes, beliefs and circumstances of the family. In the literature it is possible to derive only anecdotal information about those environmental factors. Werner Leopold, for example, elected to use only German with both of his daughters while his wife spoke to them in English. The older daughter seems to have acquired both languages simultaneously; in contrast, the younger daughter rejected German in favor of the language of her mother and the environment. However, since his explanations are anecdotal, it is impossible to generalize from them. It is, in fact, difficult to generalize from the many short descriptions found in the literature: the variables are too numerous, and the descriptions too incomplete. Our goal is to arrive at a list of those aspects of the language context which are important factors in rules which describe parental control. We have in this pursuit elected to investigate several families whose situations are crucially similar in order to isolate those conditions which seem to be necessary and typical of language control in bilingual settings. We hope to offer a list of such necessary and typical conditions which can be used across different situations to understand

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better the language attitudes, beliefs and goals of families which provide a context for learning an 'alien' language.

An understanding of the necessary and typical conditions which lead to bilingual households is of interest both to those who would wish to understand the basic patterns of language acquisition and to those who would teach children in schools where the environmental language is different from the language of the home. Since children who arrive in school carry with them a set of language patterns, as well as a set of beliefs and expectations created by the context of early language learning and use, it is important that those who would teach these children understand the salient conditions which define the early context of language acquisition. This context partially develops the child's concept of language and sense of the functions of language. For example, the child who asks in one language for a word meaning or a translation in another language is demonstrating a knowledge of the basic abstractness of language; the child who appropriately selects, for a particular situation, the functional language from his or her repertoire is demonstrating a sense of the differentiated functions of language. Vera John-Steiner (1981) has shown from a Vygoskian perspective that "more experienced learners make more conscious use of cognitive and linguistic strategies which they first developed while acquiring their native language." She supports this claim with Vygotsky's early insight that "The child acquiring a foreign language is already in command of a system of meaning in the native language which she/he transfers to the sphere of another language." Clark (1979) also has noted that the bilingual child probably has a heightened sense of both the abstractness and functions of language. What language does, how it is used, and our knowledge of it offers unique structures for learning.

Parents control most of early language environment. That is, the creation of a linguistic context is a part of the general child rearing patterns of a family. If we are to understand that context, it is necessary to explore in some detail the factors, both fixed and manipulable, which parents use to achieve their goals. We were aware that there would be many potentially relevant variables, including those influenced by the prestige of language, the children (age, daily language contact, verbal and non-verbal aptitude) and the particular parents (education, family relationships, general personality). In making a start, we considered it necessary to control as many factors as possible. We elected to investigate the acquisition of a language of undisputed prestige, not spoken in the community and acquired in a highly educated setting. In each case it was the intention of the family to remain in an English speaking environment.

We identified, in a small academic community in the midwest, a number of families of mixed parentage. We selected five families wherein one parent was a native speaker of English (L1, the language of the environment and the probable language of the child's education) and the other parent was a native speaker of French (L2). Each of these families had at least one child and in all cases the oldest child was age 5 years or less. There were ten children affected by the language controls and in each case it was the object of the parents for their children to learn French in spite of the lack of environmental supports for the language. The average educational level of the families was very high -- more than half held doctoral degrees.

These unusual controls were, we felt, justified. In these five families we had systematic language controls being imposed in the absence of outside environmental supports, by parents of highly educated background. Their choices were a) informed, b) explicit and c) required specific implementation. In addition, because of the lack of outside support, we were assured that the implementation of home language policy was chiefly responsible for the acquisition of the alien language (L2). While a complete evaluation of bilingual success would require that we sample the children's language, we took as a surrogate value the parents' evaluation of the success of the language goals of the family. The parents' goals are crucial in any study of context, for it is based on their own evaluation that they make those choices that they perceive will achieve their goals--and it is their goal and their implementation that we are investigating in this study. The parent's evaluation of their child's language competence will over time be a factor in implementing their initial decision.

Our interviewing procedure was directed towards a definition of the salient conditions for decision making and implementation in homes where there was a goal of bringing up the children bilingually. We used open ended interviews with general questions in the hope that we could ferret out those conditions which seem to be necessary and those which are more or less typical of families in which there is a goal of childhood bilingualism. We were further motivated by the need to characterize the language of the environment over time and thus included questions which would help us map the language environment profiles for each of the children. Change in the environment, it seems to us, is very important in understanding parental management of the environment. Some change is the cause of manipulation, while other change in the environment is the result of manipulation. That is, some change is under the control of the parents, while some is not. When change is not planned but due to circumstances, parents have the option of making readjustments in reaction to change.

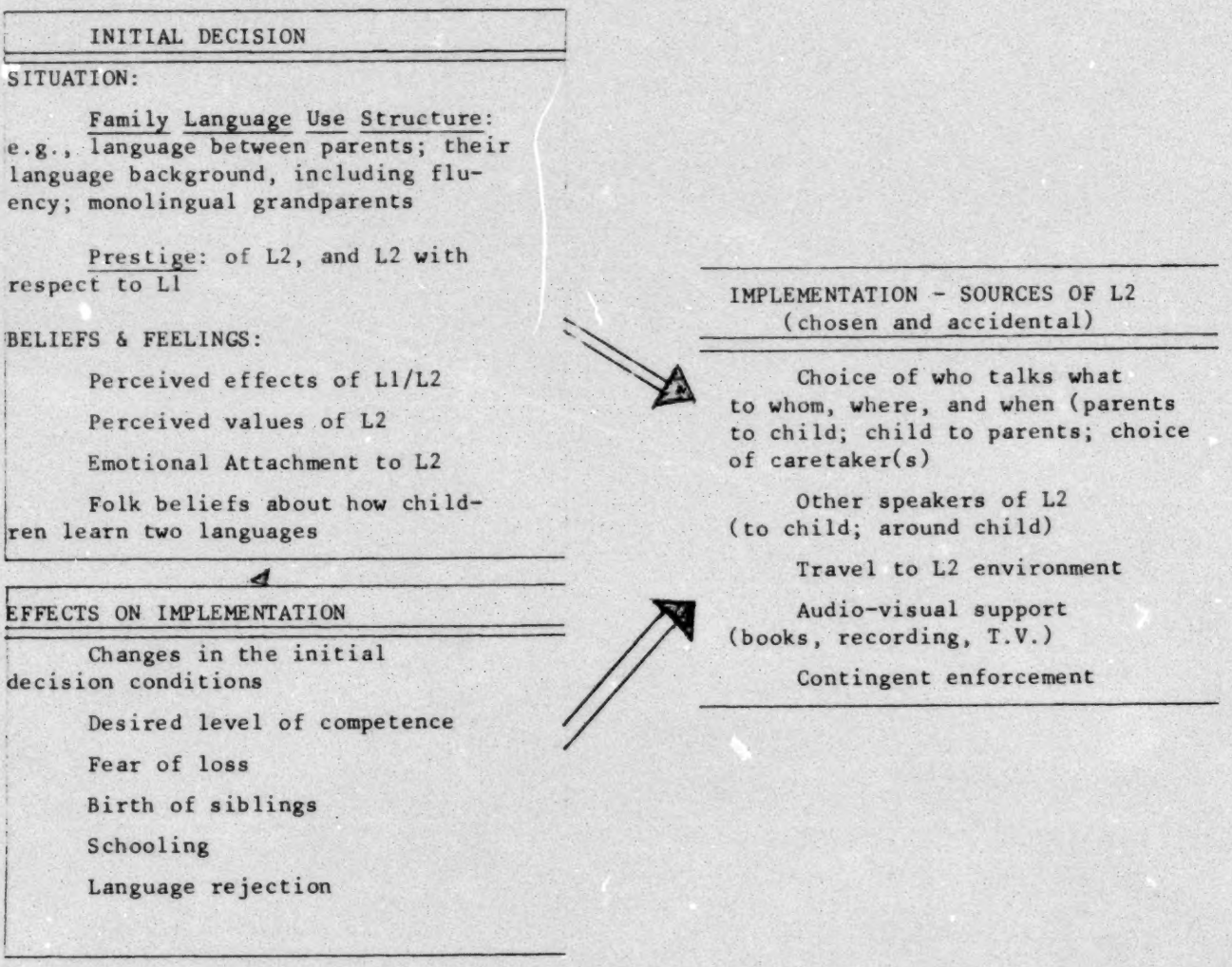
We assume that there is a set of CONDITIONS which, taken together, constitute the salient factors which result in some familial language policy and its implementation. Conditions have been used by Jackendoff (forthcoming) and Schauber and Spolsky (forthcoming) to deliniate rules for other domains. From our work so far we suggest an organization to describe the relations among the set of conditions and to suggest some of the specific conditions. Some conditions are static and given, while others reflect beliefs and feelings. These latter, by their very nature, are difficult to define and even more difficult to elicit. Conditions are differentiated according to whether they are necessary or typical. Necessary conditions are those which must be present. In contrast typicality conditions are those conditions which are normally but not necessarily associated with some category. They are more or less heavily weighted to reflect their relative salience.

We believe that the INITIAL DECISION to raise a child bilingually and the IMPLEMENTATION of that decision each can be described according to certain conditions, both necessary and typical, and that it is through some additive principle of conditions that families make decisions and implement them. Our aim was not so much to characterize

the pattern of decision and implementation of these particular families as it was to formulate a paradigm for evaluating and modeling the conditions (both necessary and typicality) that must be understood in any examination of bilingual control in families. We were trying to find categories of conditions even more than to identify some of the specific conditions. The results of our pilot interviews thus are not intended to exhaust all of the many conditions, but rather to aid in organizing the conditions that will lead to the decision and implementation of a bilingual environment.

In the following chart we enumerated the conditions which appear to be crucial to a) THE INITIAL DECISION, b) IMPLEMENTATION (or source of L2), and c) EFFECTS ON IMPLEMENTATION and show their relationships:

A PROPOSAL FOR MODELING LANUGAGE CHOICE
AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION IN BILINGUAL HOMES


INITIAL DECISION
SITUATION:
Family Language Use Structure: e.g., language between parents; their language background, including fluency; monolingual grandparents
Prestige: of L2, and L2 with respect to L1
BELIEFS & FEELINGS:
Perceived effects of L1/L2
Perceived values of L2
Emotional Attachment to L2
Folk beliefs about how children learn two languages
IMPLEMENTATION - SOURCES OF L2 (chosen and accidental)
Choice of who talks what to whom, where, and when (parents to child; child to parents; choice of caretaker(s)
Other speakers of L2 (to child; around child)
Travel to L2 environment
Audio-visual support (books, recording, T.V.)
Contingent enforcement
EFFECTS ON IMPLEMENTATION
Changes in the initial decision conditions
Desired level of competence
Fear of loss
Birth of siblings
Schooling
Language rejection

Each of these sets of conditions is seen as being interrelated, i.e., to have overlapping and reciprocal relationships. As can be seen from this chart, the conditions which influence the initial condition have been divided into two basic categories. Situation and Beliefs and Feelings. Among the situational conditions which prove to be salient, we found that, for our population, perhaps the most heavily weighted condition is that which describes the language use pattern between the parents before the birth of the first child. In all of our cases, although French was the native language of only one of the parents, French was the language of interaction before the birth of the children. "We met speaking French and it would be awkward to speak anything else together." It is almost as if they had created a family world.

Our initial hypothesis had been that the maternal language would be a heavily weighted condition, i.e. very salient, but we are no longer leaning in that direction. Rather than the mother's language, we are inclined to weight the emotional attachment to L2 more heavily. Although these two conditions may be closely related, the primary emotional attachment need not be to one's native language. That is, even if the mother's language is L1, if there is an emotional attachment to L2 and L2 is also the language spoken between the parents, those two conditions together seem to outweigh the native language of the mother. The one case which we have examined in which the mother was not a native speaker of French seems to support this contention. This English speaking mother has a clearly emotional attachment to French.

While there is agreement that mothering is highly influenced by one's own upbringing, as we now see, other factors can override that influence. It is, of course, impossible at this stage to claim that this weighting will generally be found to be true. Jarovinskij (1979) in his study of Russian-Hungarian families concludes that for the native Hungarian "the general motivational pattern . . . was that the children speak Russian because their mothers are Russian." In contrast "most parents with Russian native language said that they wanted the children to learn Russian because of very practical reasons." (p.3) However, our findings are suggestive. First of all, these cases provide an argument for pursuing an approach which describes decisions as the interaction of variously weighted conditions. Satisfaction of the two conditions of a) emotional attachment to L2, and b) L2 as the language spoken between the parents before the birth of their child seems to be sufficient to override the condition which describes the maternal language as the language of child rearing. Second, it raises questions for further study, not just to test the general validity of this observation, but also to examine the importance of certain conditions: are the language spoken between parents and the emotional attachment to L2 among those highly weighted conditions which describe "successful" implementation? Third, it raises the question of whether anything general can be said about the relationship among some of the conditions. If there is any such relationship, it will not be straightforward (or else it would not be necessary to list more than one of the conditions, since the other(s) could be derived directly from it.) For example, attachment to L2 could be created by its being the language spoken between spouses, or L2 could be spoken between spouses because of their emotional attachment to that language. Or, the emotional attachment to L2 could be the result of having spoken it as a child with parents to whom one is emotionally attached. In this last case,

the existence of monolingual grandparents would be an extremely salient condition in the initial decision, a condition on the chart we have not yet taken into consideration in this discussion.

The satisfaction of the condition requiring the existence of monolingual grandparents seems to vary in its importance more than the other conditions in the category of family language use structure. The presence of monolingual grandparents who are speakers of L2 can be a strong impetus, or, alternatively, can provide a negative influence on the decision to speak L2, depending upon the attachment of the parent to the grandparents. It is also possible for the existence of monolingual grandparents to be relatively insignificant to that initial decision.

While potentially important to the initial decision, the presence of monolingual grandparents is also potentially salient in the IMPLEMENTATION of the initial decision. Some of the families, for example, would travel to see the grandparents, thus providing a French-speaking environment for the child or children. In another instance, the presence of a monolingual English grandparent provided the only source of English for the child for a period of time.

All the conditions of the initial decision are present in Implementation and Effects on Implementation (i.e., changes over time). For example, the language used between the parents seems to be an initial condition which contributes to implementation over time. That same use structure may change over time, but it will still be a part of the effects on implementation. The condition of the presence of monolingual grandparents, which may play a part in the initial decision, will also change over time. Either through death or language acquisition, the condition of monolingual grandparents may no longer be satisfied, and that change may then have an effect upon implementation. In one of our families, travel to France was discontinued when the grandparents died.

There are also additional effects upon implementation which are conditions not present as part of the initial decision. These we call EFFECTS ON IMPLEMENTATION. For example, the later birth of siblings, or the entrance to school (either in L1 or L2) may effect the parental implementation. In some of our cases, English entered the house with the beginning of school.

Implementation takes many forms. Some forms are consciously chosen, such as the choice of babysitters, the provision of audio-visual supports in L1 and/or L2, or travel to an L2 environment. Other forms of implementation are accidental, for example, the loss of a caretaker or travel to an L2 environment for reasons not related to bilingual implementation. A decision about who talks what to whom when and where constitutes the primary set of decisions, some of which are conscious and some accidental. Fluency is of course a crucial issue here. Although all of our parents were fluent in L2 (French), some of the mothers were not fluent in L2 (English) at the time their (first) child was born. Lack of fluency in English was obviously a factor in the initial decision, and equally obviously controlled the mother's choice of language to the child. However, many possibilities still remained. Would the father speak French or

English to the child? Would there be non-French speakers in the house? We found cases in which the mother surrounded herself only with French, and others in which the mother sought English contact, through radio and television as well as by being around English speakers. We found homes which were almost exclusively French, and others where there was also a great deal of English. In the latter case, the decision of which language to use was determined for the parents primarily by the language used by guests in the house. The children seemed to differentiate by function as well: English became the language of play in several cases. The association seems to be a generalization from play groups which included monolingual English speakers. In one home, the child played with toys and with the dog in English, even when playing alone. In another, both the child and the parents addressed the cat in English although they always addressed each other and the child in French. Further research should seek to specify the necessary and typicality conditions whose interactions determine which language is spoken for each case and in each situation.

The conditions which constitute the Effects on Implementation, like those describing the Initial Decision and the Implementation, can be either conscious or accidental. We have already mentioned the death of grandparents or the learning L1 as examples of changes over time which incidentally effect implementation. Schooling and the birth of siblings would be other examples. Any of these, as well as warnings from others, can induce a fear in the parents that the child may lose L2, and this fear can then cause changes in their implementation. Or, over time, the parents can recognize the child's rejection of L2 in favor of L1, perhaps causing the parents to change their modes of implementation of L2. It has not been the purpose of this pilot study to specify these conditions or their weighting in detail, but to begin the formation of categories of conditions through which the conditions could be specified.

What we have done in this study of a very specifically controlled bilingual language situation is to try to model those salient conditions and categories of conditions which appear to be crucial: that is, we have attempted to map some of the conditions both for the initial decision for the implementation of familial controls, as well as for the later effects on implementation, insofar as they appeared to be significant for the five families we studied. Our study, thus, is suggestive of the kind of model which could account for the systematic behaviors of all families. It is clear that other situations must be examined in order to expand the chart. It would first be important to examine families in which all of the necessary conditions were present, but in which either there was no decision to control the language environment or the controls that were exerted did not succeed. It will also be imperative to study families in which the typicality conditions which we have considered to be heavily weighted are not present. In our population, for example, only one of the mothers was using a non-native language in the home. It would be important to examine other homes in which the language of the home is not the first language of the primary caretaker. Perhaps even more crucial, both parents were fluent in L2 in all of our homes. We do not know about the salient conditions for homes where only one parent knows L2. Nor do we know what happens when the language usage pattern calls for the differentiation of language according to function.

The question of the prestige of the language is also relevant. Does a language of less prestige have the same typicality conditions as one of high prestige? The variables are many and do not end with those listed above. There is the question of three-language households, of older siblings, of the effects of schooling in L1 or L2. All of these situations must be examined before we can complete our list of necessary and typicality conditions. As is usually the case, the exploration of uncharted territory leaves us with more questions than answers.

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